

# Tracing Horror and Violence in *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* through Speculative Fiction

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study will take living bodies as abjections in the selected short stories. This study analyzes the characters by using Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical concept of abject, which displays violence committed against the marginalized group in the selected stories from *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan*. The purpose of the study is to critically evaluate how speculative fiction deals with marginalized communities, portraying them as abject to evoke horror in the stories. The descriptions and vivid imagery used by the writer in these fables create a repulsive atmosphere for the readers. The study will comment on the mindset of the dominant group in the center of society and their treatment of those who are living in the peripheries. The focus of the study is to explore how the bodily experience of characters in a prejudiced community in terms of body mutilation, starvation, poor hygiene, and physical assault adds to the process of abjection. The research, therefore, is an analytical and in-depth study.*

**Keywords:** Horror, Violence, Abjection, Marginalized group, Dominant group, Disgust, Speculative fiction, living bodies

## Introduction

Usman T. Malik is a Pakistani-American writer who published his debut book *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* in 2021. The book is a collection of short stories that are inspired by Pakistani myths, stories, and folktales. This collection of short stories is the first of its kind when it comes to Pakistani speculative fiction. Every story has a graphic representation of the whole story at the end of it which is a unique amalgam of graphics and literature in English writings of speculative fiction. This book has won the 2022 Crawford Award, the first Pakistani ever to win the award.

Science fiction is rather a new subject considering literary studies in Pakistan. According to Usman T. Malik, “Pakistani science fiction has been historically non-existent, except for a few writers” (Malik 2021). There are various stories in Urdu Literature that fall into the category of science fiction. For instance, Ismat Chughtai’s *Roshni ka Safar, Kala Jadu* by M. A. Rahat, and Musharraf Ali Farooqi’s *The Jinn Darazgosh*. Other writers include Manto and Mumtaz Mufti who wrote for Urdu Sci-fi in Pakistan. Sci-fi and speculative fiction are sometimes considered synonymous with each other but speculative fiction is a broad term that includes elements of fantasy, sci-fi, supernatural, horror, utopia, dystopia, romanticism, etc. Pakistani speculative fiction includes fantasy and children’s literature i.e. “Bachon ki Duniya”, “Jinnati Duniya”, and “Bacho ka Bagh”. But this is still written in Urdu and considered a part of Urdu Speculative fiction. *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* is the first book of speculative fiction in English of Pakistani origin.

The term speculative fiction was first coined by Robert A. Heinlein in his 1947 essay “On the Writings of Speculative Fiction”. Lyndsie discusses his definition of speculative fiction in her article:

[N]arratives concerned not so much with science or technology as with human actions in response to a new situation created by science or technology, speculative fiction highlights a human rather than technological problem. Manusos )

Malik introduces the neglected section of Pakistani society through his short stories. He shows us the social disparity towards women, people belonging to other religious sects, and the lower class. This paper will analyze the disparity committed against the marginalized people by creating disgusting images ultimately displaying horror and violence in the mind of the readers.

### **Literature Review**

It is important to note that the primary text *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* is a recent publication. Hence, scholarly articles or dissertations are limited to the primary text. This research is significant as it analyzes the text that falls in the category of speculative fiction, a new genre developing in the English language writings of Pakistan. This section gives an account of the book reviews on the primary text and analyzes the scholarly articles that are directly related to the topic under discussion and Malik's take on his short stories.

Firstly, there is a recorded interview with Usman T. Malik where he talks about his book and its significance. The interview was recorded at Lahore Literary Festival 2021 by Dawn Newspaper. Shoaib Ahmed (2021) who conducted his interview jotted down his views in his article "Fables Depicting A 'Haunted Pakistan'". Shoaib Ahmed says that he had a conversation with the author where he inquired about different aspects of the book. According to the author, the title of the book symbolizes options and opportunities, and his stories deal with human choices. Referring to the second part of the title of the book, the author says that a lot of people look at fables as moral allegories. A fable is like a torch-bearer of history. The author has written this book to represent a different Pakistan, a haunted one, which had come out of a two-decade-long war. These short stories are based in haunted Pakistan. This article will explore the horror and violence that reside in haunted Pakistan through the theory of abjection.

Malik's stories are a reflection of social issues prevalent in Pakistan. Beenish Mahmood appreciates Malik's use of dark imagery to illustrate the social issues of Pakistan. Beenish Mahmood (2021) in her article

“Book Review: *Midnight Doorways*” says that the anthology centers on deep, dark, and uncanny death as a recurrent theme in all short stories of the book. According to her, the book is a mixture of fantasy, speculative fiction, sci-fi, horror, mystery, and magical realism thus ‘pushes the boundaries of realism’. The author’s characterization and portrayal of an unreal and horrific environment are what make it unique in South Asian fiction. The stories are rooted in indigenous land illustrating its social issues by using supernatural elements in the book. This paper will explore how marginalized communities face prejudice from the dominant group in the form of horror and violence.

Another writer Fatima Arif gives her review about *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan*. Fatima Arif (2021) in her article “Usman T. Malik Fables Interconnect Speculative Fiction with Local Culture” illustrates that short stories fall into the genre of speculative fiction. According to her, every story is unique, and the unifying factor is the desi context around which they are developed. This type of storytelling is what makes Malik’s fiction unique among his contemporaries. These short stories are embedded into a familiar setting and can transport readers to their alternative space. These stories are manifestations of our culture and traditions commemorating ancient Lahore and Mohenjo-Daro. Furthermore, it highlights real issues in Pakistan like the APS terrorist attack, attitude towards differently-abled people, and lack of disaster management in poor neighborhoods. This paper will examine the psyche of dominant people to indulge in violence against marginalized people during communal riots.

In conclusion, the genre, speculative fiction, is an unexplored area in the English language writings of Pakistan, making this collection of short stories the first of its kind. These selected short stories have not been analyzed in the context of the transformation of post-partition unified Lahore to prejudiced contemporary Lahore through storytelling within the context of speculative fiction. Also, this study will show the role of abjection in tracing horror and violence that is present in contemporary Lahore depicted in the selected short stories.

## **Research Question**

1. How does abjection show horror and violence through the marginalized characters of the selected short stories?

## **Research Methodology**

This research adheres to the theoretical framework of Kristeva's perspective of abjection and its relation to horror and violence in her book *Powers of Horror*. It is a theoretical explanation of the mental condition of repulsion and disgust. The idea of abjection is related to the situation when the subject goes through a terrifying loss of dissimilarity between itself and objects/others. The abject is those practices that are divergent and disturb the conscious ego, the 'I'. It is the region between being and non-being, between familiar and unfamiliar.

For Kristeva, the abject becomes a reason for the disruption of identity, political system, and social order. This study will use Kristeva's idea of abjection and apply it to all marginalized characters of the selected short stories. The concept of abjection will illustrate the psychology behind the violent behavior of the people. Also, it will analyze the vivid imagery and uncanny surroundings to trace the horror and violence depicted in the selected short stories. Moreover, to study violence, we will examine marginalized characters and their relationship with the people of the dominant group in the selected short stories.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

The short story "Dead Lovers on Each Blade, Hung" is about a Heroinchie who gets arrested for the charge of murder of Hakim Shafi and his wife Maliha. He narrates the story to Inspector about meeting Hakim at the park. Heroinchie also recounts the journey of him and Hakim in searching for Maliha who runs away from home in search of Naag mani. Maliha was very young when she married Hakim. She was fascinated with Cobra and the mythology related to it. She was a herpetologist that explains her passion for snakes and valuable stones. Both Heroinchies and Hakim Shafi searched Maliha to far-off places.

Heroinchies assume that a shape-shifting snake has killed Hakim Shafi and Maliha but Inspector does not believe his story and puts the blame on Heroinchie for the assassination. In the end, Heroinchies dies due to physical assault in police custody.

In the “Dead Lovers on Each Blade, Hung” two marginalized characters, Heroinchies and Maliha, experience horror and violence through their life events that occurred in patriarchal Pakistani society. Heroinchies is a term coined by Usman T. Malik to represent a group of marginalized people consisting of drug addicts and drug dealers. Heroinchies is a master status used by Malik to represent drug addicts and drug sellers in his story. A master status is a label that describes the chief characteristic of an individual (Little and McGivern ch. 7). The title ‘Heroinchie’ is a representation of what they do for a living. They are usually alienated from society and often face social exclusion. Owing to their social exclusion, they do not enjoy basic human rights, especially the right to life, the right to social security, the right to equality before the law, and freedom from arbitrary detention. Heroinchies are not only denied basic human rights but also experience three deaths in the text. These three deaths are symbolic of three times the trauma, torture, and pain these marginalized people have to go through. Heroinchie felt dead when he came to know about the death of his son. He experienced his third death at the police station when he gets deprived of basic human rights and assign physical torture, physical abuse, and lastly betrayal from the police, a government institution meant to protect its citizens.

Maliha is another character in the narrative who encounters terror and violence. At the age of eight, she was sold by a group of gypsies to an elderly man named Hakim Shafi. Maliha's child marriage was caused by poverty and lack of security. In southern Punjab and rural Sindh, it is customary for parents to marry off their daughters to older, affluent men due to dire financial circumstances. The question of whether Maliha was content in her arranged marriage with Hakim Shafi is raised by the practice of child marriage. Heroinchie begins to reflect on their connection. “Her heart- did he win it, or chain it with need?” (Malik 115) In the short story, Hakim belongs to the dominant group of the society

whereas Maliha symbolizes the marginalized community.

Owing to her child marriage, Maliha struggled with a variety of problems e.g. childlessness, sexual abuse, forced marriage, unhealthy childhood, and a controlling husband. The age gap between Hakim and Maliha prevents Maliha from having children. Due to his advanced age, Hakim was infertile, whereas she was fertile. She was battling childlessness due to child marriage. Hakim informed Heroinchie of this circumstance, “We were barren.” I was” (Malik 115). She did not have a healthy childhood. This is a sort of violence committed against the marginalized community by the dominant group. In addition to that, Maliha was a victim of sexual abuse as a child bride. She was deprived of a healthy childhood. This is a form of violence that the dominant group does to the marginalized community. First, they deprive women of their childhood rights and later subjugate them by disregarding their life decisions such as personal likes and dislikes. She develops an interest in searching for Naag mani as she is an adventurer like other gypsies. Hakim mocks this idea of precious Cobra pearl and calls it a fantasy.

Hakim and Maliha share a master-slave relationship because he needs the devotion and affection of a female, while Maliha requires financial aid. Hashim provides her with food, clothing, and shelter. He also provides her with the education necessary to become a herpetologist. “She loved me. It might have been a mixed kind of love, but she did” (Malik 116). Heroinchie pondered whether the marriage was a forced union or whether it would evolve into a union of love over time. It is significant to notice how the conjugal relation between Maliha and Hakim solely functions on dominance, abusiveness, mockery, and enviousness rather than any matrimonial bliss. Their master-slave interrelation imperatively accentuates the androcentric societies that entirely function on male needs and demands. Thus, objectifying women to the point where they lose their identity and existence.

Mustafa and Yasin were drug dealers, and they sold drugs to Poison Men's competitors on the international market. When the Poison Men discover the deception, they mutilate the bodies of Heroinchies,

including Yasin and his companions. “Their bodies were found in the pond, throats cut from ear to ear, rusted needles jammed inside their penises, fingers were trapped in tree roots” (Malik 121). Many criminals get their ears cut off as a result of corporal punishment. The Poison men amputated the ears of Heroinchies in retaliation for their treason. The Poison Men are the leaders of the drug trade. They spare no one who stabs them in the back. In addition to dismembering Yasin and his companions, the Poison Men also murder Heroinchie towards the end of the story. All of these murders of the marginalized community demonstrate that the dominating group will go to any lengths for their profit. Similarly, such horrendous punishments highlight the barbarity and terrific repercussions that Heroinchies endured while eventually vanishing into the abyss of anonymity and nothingness.

The relationship of the police officer with Heroinchie is a manifestation of the psychology of the dominant group toward marginalized people in society. In a social hierarchy, the police officer enjoys a higher position whereas Heroinchie is out of the league. The police officer wants to fetch the information about Hakim and Maliha from Heroinchie at any cost. Hence, he uses every possible means to get the information out of him. The officer tortures and physically abuses him as there is no authority to protect him. Moreover, he does not believe in what Heroinchie says as he has no witness who can testify anything. The police inspector thinks that Heroinchie is making up stories to hide his crime of murder of Hakim and Maliha. Police are meant to protect the civil rights of the citizens and custodians of law and order. But it is the police from which Heroinchies feel unsafe and are sold to the underworld. This shows the biases of autonomous groups who not only exploit the dependent ones for their good but also nullify their existence by snatching their basic rights as a human.

The short story, “Fortune of Sparrows”, accounts for the life of an orphan girl who becomes desolate and isolated in the orphanage as the story progresses. The story depicts the environment of an orphanage. The orphans do not have family, siblings, friends, or relatives but one another. Orphanage brings loneliness and alienation. It is haunted by ghostly



reflections of the past. Furthermore, it tells us about the culture of the orphanage. The young orphans are brought to an orphanage and when they become adults they are married off to a suitable match. *Rishtay Wali* Aunty and Wedding Cat play an important role in determining the suitable groom for the girls. Girls also believe the predictions of the bird man about marriage and fortune. The Girls learn all household work and pray for their good kismet. When girls get married, they never get to see one another again. And this cycle of orphanage remains continues.

“Fortune of Sparrows” tells us the story of the girls who live in an orphanage and the rituals and customs accustomed to it. Orphans belong to a marginalized section of society as they lost their families and are compelled to live in an orphanage. The orphanage itself is a “total institution”, a place where people are isolated from society and are forced to follow the rules of that place (Little and McGivern ch.6). They lose all rights, freedom, and personal wishes to that institution/orphanage. Orphans are devoid of the family’s perks and advantages. In the text, the narrator wishes to be a part of the family. There is a room with mirrors in an orphanage where ghosts of the past reside. The orphan girl often sees ghosts and reflections of mysterious people in the mirror. These ghosts seem to be her forefathers who are there to bless her present life. The co-existence of past and present people in the mirror room reflects her longing for an extended family where she can engage her emotional needs such as love, care, and affection. The ghost of the girl in the mirror is a reflection of her past self that is somehow lost within the wall of the orphanage. This appearance of her past self gets her horrified as she has abandoned her past identity, wishes, and dreams to become a part of the orphanage. Also, the loss of identity of an individual is an act of violence on the part of the institution-orphanage.

The mirror image creates both abjection and horror. This mirror image creates horror as she has lost her former identity. Anything impure is abjection according to Kristeva as she quotes “The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss” (Kristeva 5). Her new self is impure because in order to get adjusted to

the institution's rules she transforms her subjective self which makes it abjection. Childhood innocence is understood as a period of utter identity with natural essence, before the conflictual impulses that characterize later forms of subjectivity (Duschinsky 2012). Kristeva considers both childhood innocence and science as pure in *Powers of Horror* (1982). The orphan girl's innocence during her childhood was her real self and identity before admitting to the orphanage. When she gets amalgamated with the institution's rules, her subjective self gets polluted or impure which makes it abjection. The realization of changing one's self makes her horrified about herself. Thus, making her personality and identity torn between the complexities of past and present in addition to further deteriorating her state of being.

*Powers of Horror* presents a theory of the 'abject' as 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, and rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva). The orphan girl experiences horror and violence in the form of emotional trauma such as a sense of family loss, and one's identity to comply with orphanage customs and rules. Goffman referred to the process of being stripped of one external identity as a "mortification of the self" (Goffman 1961). Due to the mortification of self, her former identity from time to time itself to her. The mirror is a reflection of her hidden desires, the lost self she has to lose for conformity. She has completely lost her former identity. She is neither happy nor sad as she becomes used to the environment of the orphanage. As I watched, the girl in the mirror leaned back, pointed at me, and began to laugh (Malik 84). The girl in the mirror mocked her as she was a free and rebellious soul whereas the present self is submissive and subdued. She flapped her skinny, crinkling arms, and I cried out and turned, knocking over the footstool, and fled from the room (Malik 84). Such aspects also highlight the sacrificial nature of women that they inherently carry in themselves. As a result, they align with their environment either consciously or unconsciously because conformity is ingrained in their nature.

The short story, "Ishq", recounts the tale of two lovers who were obsessed with each other. In the story, Hashim's paranormal love and

devotion towards Parveen create horrifying imagery for its readers. This was difficult for the boy who, it seemed, had collected all the love he ever had and in one stroke squandered it on a dying, delirious girl (Malik 27). He sort of worships the festering body of Parveen which creates disgust among readers. This disgusting feeling arouses horrifying imagery in the text. "Hashim wouldn't let us bury her," Ammi said, we were all worried about putrefaction except for Hashim" (Malik 27). Hashim was so much obsessed with the dead girl that he sat nearby her waiting for eternity. Kristeva quotes that "The corpse (or cadaver: cadere, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance" (Kristeva 4). The fascination which dead ultimately creates a sense of disgust among the readers creating horror and violence within the text.

Apart from horror, Hashim experiences violence in the form of self-neglect which was due to his devotion to Parveen. The definition by the National Association of Adult Protective Services Administrators states that:

Self-neglect is an adult's inability, due to physical or mental impairment or diminished capacity, to perform essential self-care tasks, which include the following: obtaining essential food, clothing, shelter, and medical care; obtaining goods and services necessary to maintain physical health, mental health, or general safety; and/or managing one's financial affairs. (Zawisza et al. 1)

Self-neglect affects Hashim both mentally and physically. He experiences major body thinning and weight loss due to starvation and grief. He experiences violence in the form of self-neglect which was due to his devotion toward Parveen. For Parveen, Hashim abandoned his shakarkandi business by shattering his vials to take care of Parveen. He was so much worried about Parveen's health that he began to look more ill than her. He left his shack to be with her. He even sold his bicycle to get money for chemotherapy.

Hashim neglected personal hygiene, food, and a clean environment for the sake of Parveen's love. Hashim's hands were wet with Parveen's

bodily fluids such as sweat and blood. Sometimes she had fits and her bitten tongue crept from the corner of her mouth and bled on piss-stained bed sheets (Malik 27). Hashim remained starved because the room smelled awful due to rainwater and Parveen's rotten dead body. And nobody was willing to enter the house due to the stinking smell. Such lack of hygiene, the presence of a dead body with the alive young boy, and the dirty environment give readers a feeling of abjection. Moreover, abjection is a tool used by Hashim to get close to Parveen. He uses uncleanness and a filthy environment as a way to stop people from interfering between the two. He becomes a part of horror and abjection. He cherished horror as his beloved became one- the abjection. Bano was first repulsed by Hashim and his surroundings and stopped providing food for him.

The protagonist of the short story "Ishq" is Parveen whose disability is caused by polio that weakened her body and leg. Polio has remained a significant metaphor in post-colonial texts for the sufferings and trauma it gives to its victims. In this study, Polio symbolizes social disintegration where the dominant group of people looks down upon marginalized people. Polio symbolically shows us the mindset of the dominant people towards marginalized people which is usually negative, biased, and bigoted. The dominant people consist of healthy people with no disease; male members of society, and people who belong to the middle class or upper middle class. Parveen categories into the marginalized group. Owing to her physical condition Parveen's movement is restricted to Narrow Alley and its Neighborhood. This is her whole world where she lives with her parents and siblings and where she falls in love with Hashim, Shakarkandi Vendor. Her chances of social growth are minimal due to her social status and health condition. Parveen faces double marginalization in society as she is a woman belonging to an underprivileged class with a disease.

Parveen along with her sister Bano gets bullied by the boys on her way to school who call her "Cripple, cripple!" (Malik 23). The bullying was also one of the reasons that make her quit school. She was ostracized by the neighborhood children. Parveen cannot dare to chase her dream of

getting an education owing to bullying and unwanted comments from the school boys. She faces mockery instead of encouragement and appreciation for her efforts from society. Pathak (2015) has highlighted the fact that People with Disabilities go through various developmental and societal challenges that many a time lead to their social exclusion (Rajni 3). This is how Parveen was confined only to her Neighborhood. Furthermore, not only did she experience the abomination of males but also females in addition to bearing the narrative of an unfortunate happening.

Not only men but also women criticize other women if they are a bit different. “How could he love my older sister with her humiliating disability and her weird, quiet manner? I couldn’t understand it” (Malik 24). Bano could not understand the love between Parveen and Hashim. As Parveen has lost her physical beauty which is the epitome of love so her sister gets jealous of her good fortune. She gets the love of someone whose in mentions are good and whose love is pure. Hashim loves Parveen because both share a bond of pain and lack of sympathy in all their lives. Both belong to a marginalized group of society as Hashim is an orphan and Parveen is a disabled girl. On the other hand, her sister was married off to a cocaine addict who causes domestic violence against her. She was jealous of her sister because despite meeting the beauty standards of society she did not get a good husband. She also wants true love for herself.

When Parveen died Hashim was emotionally vulnerable at that time. At that time when Bano seduces him, he realizes his sin that he has betrayed his beloved with her sister. His moral conscience shows his guilt in the form of a hallucination of a ghost. This feeling of betrayal causes horror. “Wherever I turn I see her drowning,” he shrieked (Malik 38). Nobody can see the ghost also indicates that it’s conscience of Hashim that is tormenting him. A group of men and women also testify to his hallucination “Is he crazy? There’s nothing there. He’s just pounding at the water” (Malik 37). Bano wants to save Hashim from drowning in his guilt but it seems useless. First, she tries to soothe his nerves and tries to assure him that there is no one. Then she gathered help from the outside

but he sank into his disappointment of letting her beloved riot in an abandoned home. He sank in order to avoid pangs of conscience. Hashim undergoes self-punishment to recompense for his sins.

The short story, “In the Ruins of Mohenjo-Daro”, tells us a story about Cadet College Boys and their teachers who embark on a journey to visit the site of Mohenjo-Daro as a part of their study project. The female teachers Noor and Tabinda face sexism, discrimination, and prejudice from both male colleagues and students. The environment is hostile for Noor and Tabinda. Moreover, the story tells us about the ancient history of Mohenjo-Daro; its ancient rulers, and civilization. Suddenly horror and panic grabbed the teaching faculty and students when a terror attack occurred at a private school near the site. The area was hijacked by attackers. The teachers and students have nowhere to go except to remain on a bus with limited food supply and shelter in the middle of the night. Besides, some boys vanish in the dark. They are left with some mates and students in the cold night and fog in the ruins.

In the “Ruins of Mohenjo-Daro”, there is a male desire to control a woman’s body which makes the female body a site of abjection. In the story, the woman’s body is treated as an abjection in a patriarchal society. The woman is a marginalized gender in Pakistani male-dominated society. The power dynamics of society show that men want to have a strong influence on women at home and even in the workplace. Men consider women as a shared collective honor of men in every walk of life. Every woman is linked to them. Tabinda undergoes domestic violence at the hand of her husband which shows violence endured by the marginalized group due to violent ones. The torture of the body represented in the short story devalues the status of a woman from subject, object to abject.

In the short story, there is a social subjugation of women as their roles are defined as homemakers so they do not enjoy the same respect as men do in the workplace. As long as women confine themselves to the symbolic order of male dominant society, they are considered mere subjects or at times object, but the denial of those orders will take her

towards abjection. Females are always expected to be entangled in matrimonial duties, domestic responsibilities, and motherhood. They are always driven into situations where they are supposed to be submissive and live as slaves or puppets in the hands of males. In the text, Noor has recently joined as a teacher in the Boys Cadet College. Noor has graduated from High School in New Hampshire. She is new to the working environment of Pakistan Cadet College. She was astounded at the cultural difference between Western and Eastern countries. Noor wonders if she wore jeans and shirts here what the reaction of the male community here would be.

The short story, “The Vaporization Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family”, is dedicated to the victims and martyrs of the APS Peshawar attack that occurred in 2014. The short story narrates the story of a young widow Tara who has witnessed the horror and violence a bomb blast can bring to people’s lives. She has been a victim of a suicide bomb blast which rips her off her family and social status. She experiences personal grievances as well as social chaos that shape the course of her life. When Tara’s husband, Hashim, dies she completes her B.Sc. degree under the guardianship of his uncle, Wasif Khan. She then volunteered to establish a nursery to help displaced children who got affected by the flash floods near her university. Afterward, she left for the mountains in search of her brother Sohail. She, then, encountered a human-less creature that is supposed to be Sohail. His eyes melted, his nose bridge collapsed; the bones underneath were simmering white seas that rolled and twinkled across the constantly melting and rearranging meat of him (Malik 163). He was waiting for death which is a great equalizer. For Kristeva, mutilated body presents a site for abjection which invokes horror and disgust among readers.

In the short story, Tara was denied a school education and forced into child marriage. She was taken out of school when she was thirteen and married off at sixteen to Hashim. Marriage is an institution to provide social security to the woman. But in Tara's case, this act has been ironic as this institution does not give her social security but rather ripped her off from everything she could ever have. After becoming a widow, she

calls herself 'Other' (Malik 152) to show her alienation. Being devoid of a family looks like a sin to her. Other women look at Tara as if she were a rabid animal. In Pakistani society, a widow lost her respect after the death of her husband and was deemed an outcast (Ijaz). In the short story, Tara wasn't allowed to go to her mother's cousin until she mentions her husband Hashim would also want the same for her. It shows the male privilege that their wishes are still addressed and considered after their death in Pakistani society. On the other hand, a young widow is such a concept no one could easily grasp.

Tara belongs to a marginalized group as she is a widow who has lost her brother and mother. The prejudices Tara has to face from society make her feel lonely and alienated from society. She wants to educate herself about the ways of the world. She wants to know if someone has faced a similar situation before and found a way to deal with all suffering, trauma, and mental distress. She wants to see if she can fit into society. "I want to learn about the world, I want to see if there are others like me. If there have been others before me" (Malik 152). Tara was a wife and daughter. She loved everyone in her life. Now she wants love for herself. "I love you, but I need to love me too" (Malik 152). This is the reason she feels jealous about the love bond between Sohail and Gulminay as she has lost such affection in her life. She was to feel a sense of esteem or belonging as per Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory suggests a desire to become everything one is capable of becoming. (McLeod 4).

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that living bodies present a site of both abjection and violence. All marginalized characters are portrayed as abject in these short stories, which gives society the authority to dominate them in a social setting. It justifies discrimination against women and toxic masculinity. Noor faces workplace harassment, social subjugation, gender-based violence, and domestic violence in the short story "In the Ruins of Mohenjo-Daro". In the short story "The Vaporization Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family", Tara, an outcast, suffers from emotional, psychological, and physical afflictions, including child marriage, the loss



of family and friends, obstacles to obtaining an education, alienation, and isolation. The short story “Fortune of Sparrows” stripped women of their individuality and prepared them for a future of passive marriage. The short story “Ishq” portrays Parveen, a physically disabled poor girl, as an abject faces psychological torment from the dominant group such as school boys and relatives around her. Later she faces jealousy from her sister. Maliha was a victim of child marriage in the story “Dead Lovers on Each Blade, Hung” and as a result, she is childless. As a result of being an outcast, she experiences this trauma for the duration of her life. Even though she would never have a child, she was married to an elderly man by her parents. Hence, this paper justifies its main argument by analyzing the psyche of marginalized characters present in the selected short stories.

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